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SUBJECT: GOP RESPONDS QUICKLY TO CAMPESENO UNREST IN ANDAHUAYLAS

REF: LIMA 12

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1. (U) SUMMARY. The GOP responded quickly to road blockages last week by campesinos around Andahuaylas, Apurimac Department, declaring a 30-day state of emergency on 4/3, substantially increasing police presence in the area and offering to send a high-level negotiating commission to address the demonstrators' demands for higher potato prices and improved roads. The GOP, recognizing that this is the same volatile region where the Ethno-Cacerista uprising took place three months ago, has been quick off the mark to ensure that the latest unrest is dealt with expeditiously and peacefully. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) The Government declared a 30-day state of emergency on 4/3, in the provinces of Andahuaylas and Chincheros, located in the northwest corner of the Apurimac Region. The action came in response to protests carried out by several hundred local farmers demanding higher prices for their products. The protesters blocked all of the roads leading to the city of Andahuaylas, and took over the local airport, blocking the runway. They demanded that the government purchase 7,000 tons of potatoes, as over-production had dropped the price for this crop to about three U.S. cents per kilo (from previous levels of around 17 cents), and they also called for better roads to get their produce to market. Officials reports said 15 people were injured in clashes linked to the strike activity.

3. (U) The state of emergency decree suspends certain constitutional guarantees: it permits warrantless search of homes, restricts the right of free transit, and prohibits public assemblies and demonstrations. The decree authorizes the National Police, with the support of the Armed Forces, to take measures to maintain control of internal order in the affected provinces. This was the second time this year that a state of emergency decree was issued for Andahuaylas; the previous instance resulted from the Ethno-Cacerist uprising in January (Reftel).

4. (U) Speaking for the Government, Deputy Agriculture Minister Julio Escudero said the protesters should call off the strike for 48 hours. If they did, a high-level government commission would meet with them, but Escudero averred that the Government would not negotiate under pressure. Vice Minister of Social Development Mario Molina also pledged that the GOP would buy 5,000 tons of potatoes from small producers through its food distribution program (Pronaa). Despite initial rejection by some sectors, peasant leaders announced 4/4 that they had agreed to a 48-hour suspension of the strike to allow the arrival of the government commission. When it became clear that the roads and airport were still blocked, however, Agriculture Minister Manuel Manrique said the commission would not travel until the blockades were lifted. Manrique also accused Congressman Michael Martinez, who has also been an outspoken proponent of cocallero interests, of spurring on the protesters in order to serve Martinez's personal political interests.

5. (SBU) Interior Ministry Intelligence Director Jorge Cardenas told Deputy Polcoun on 4/4 that the situation on the ground had not changed appreciably and that demonstrations were continuing, but the police were moving to put reinforcements in place and take control. Cardenas said that by the end of the day, the PNP would have three times its normal contingent operating in the Andahuaylas area. As of the morning of 4/5, 300 police officers were reported to be encamped in San Jeronimo, on the outskirts of Andahuaylas, and access to the airport had been restored.

6. (SBU) COMMENT: The GOP's prompt dispatch of police reinforcements to Andahuaylas and its offer to send a high-level commission to address the demonstrators' demands reflects the Government's concern about this area's volatility in the wake of the January Ethno-Cacerista uprising. By contrast, the GOP has not/not expressed an intention to engage in a similar dialogue with cotton growers who have carried out blockages of the Pan American Highway near Ica recently. END COMMENT.

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